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PASS TO USAID AND PEACE CORPS

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SUBJECT: DCM OUTREACH TO ISABELA PROVINCE

REF: 06 MANILA 01259

¶1. DCM Jones utilized a December 20-21 visit to Isabela province in northern Luzon to highlight long-standing ties with this highly agricultural area. At the provincial capital of Ilagan, Governor Grace Padaca, the 2006 Benigno Aquino Fellow for Journalism, provided a warm welcome and expressed special delight that the DCM's sister, a former Peace Corps volunteer in the province, was able to accompany him and also visit her host family. The Governor privately highlighted the difficulty of eradicating corruption and successfully implementing reforms against the opposition of political dynasties and sometimes the Catholic Church, and despite continued threats from the communist New People's Army. She stressed the importance of encouraging a broad and well developed civil society as well as fundamental election reforms.

¶2. During the DCM's stop in the provincial commercial city of Cauayan, city officials expressed appreciation for an ongoing USAID project to improve solid waste management in the city through the Philippine Environmental Governance (EcoGov) Project. They emphasized their desire to have a portion of Cauayan declared a special Agro-Industrial Economic Zone in order to modernize and improve the efficiency of agricultural production in the region as well as to promote further economic development by companies such as San Miguel, which already has a bottling facility there.

¶3. The DCM had a thirty-minute interview on a popular regional music/news radio station, during which he commented on the strength of the U.S.-Philippine relationship, the ongoing contributions by Peace Corps Volunteers throughout the country, the importance of election reform, and benefits for the heirs of Filipino World War II veterans.

JONES